DANCE

THE GOD-INSPIRED MOVES

STAND

OF A WOMAN ON

RUN

HOLY GROUND

Jess Connolly

ZONDERVAN®

Exclusive Savings for Online Bible Study Participants

Save 40% off the book, study guide or DVD in the FaithGateway Store

Order Now



Dance, Stand, Run

Jess Connolly

Grace is always good news. But it's not cheap—true grace compels us to change. That's where holiness comes in.

Beloved writer, speaker, and bestselling coauthor of *Wild and Free*, Jess Connolly will be the first to admit that not long ago, like many women, she grasped grace but she had forgotten holiness. *Dance, Stand, Run* charts her discovery that holiness was never meant to be a shaming reminder of what we "should" be doing, but rather a profound privilege of becoming more like Christ. That's when we start to change the world, rather than being changed by it.

Dance, Stand, Run is an invitation to the daughters of God to step into the movements of abundant life: dancing in grace, standing firm in holiness, and running on mission. Through story and study, Jess casts a fresh vision for how to live into your identity as a holy daughter of God, how to break free of cheap grace and empty rule-keeping, and finally, how to live out your holy influence with confidence before a watching world. Spoiler alert: it's a beautiful thing.

For anyone longing to take their place in what God is doing in the world, *Dance, Stand, Run* will rally your strength, refresh your purpose, and energize your faith in a God who calls us to be like Him.

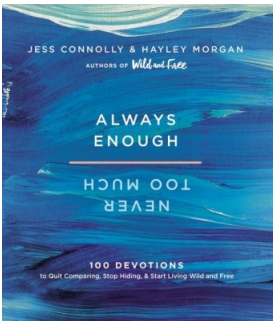
ALSO BY JESS CONNOLLY

Wild and Free with Hayley Morgan



COMING APRIL 2018

Always Enough, Never Too Much: 100 Devotions to Quit Comparing, Stop Hiding, and Start Living Wild and Free with Hayley Morgan



ALL GOOD THINGS COLLECTIVE

Jess would like to offer all our Online Bible Study participants 15% off with coupon code ***DANCESTANDRUN*** *- good now through June 1 2018. Dance ,Stand, Run hats, tees, and sweatshirts are available - and so much more!*

Shop at www.allgoodthingscollective.com





ZONDERVAN

Dance, Stand, Run
Copyright © 2017 by Jessica Ashleigh Connolly

Requests for information should be addressed to:
Zondervan, *3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546*

ISBN 978-0-310-34984-6 (audio)

ISBN 978-0-310-34565-7 (ebook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Connolly, Jess, author.
Title: Dance, stand, run : the God-inspired moves of a woman on holy ground / Jess Connolly.
Description: Grand Rapids, Michigan : Zondervan, [2017]
Identifiers: LCCN 2017026913 | ISBN 9780310345640 (softcover)
Subjects: LCSH: Christian women--Religious life. | Holiness.
Classification: LCC BV4527 .C64395 2017 | DDC 248.8/43--dc23 LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2017026913

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.Zondervan.com. The "NIV" and "New International Version" are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations marked ESV are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®). Copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked MSG are taken from *The Message*. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress. All rights reserved. Represented by Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.®

Any Internet addresses (websites, blogs, etc.) and telephone numbers in this book are offered as a resource. They are not intended in any way to be or imply an endorsement by Zondervan, nor does Zondervan vouch for the content of these sites and numbers for the life of this book.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Published in association with literary agent Jenni Burke of D.C. Jacobson & Associates LLC, an Author Management Company, www.dcjacobson.com

Cover image: Creative Market
Interior design: Kait Lamphere

First printing August 2017 / Printed in the United States of America

CONTENTS

Our Dance, Stand, Run *Declaration* 9
A Note from Jess 11

PROLOGUE: Pretty Little Liars 13
The Book I Didn't Set Out to Write

1. We're Missing Out 27
Reclaiming Our Holy Identity

2. Don't You Feel Like Dancing? 55
The Power of Revival-Starting Grace

3. Draw a Circle 81
Why Holiness Starts with You

4. Why? and Really? 105
The Truth about Holy and Unholy Habits

5. Teach Us How to Pray 131
What Happens When Holy Women Talk to a Holy God

6. Don't Try to Learn Me 159
What Happens When Holy Women Read God's Holy Word

7. Shoulds, Coulds, and High-Pitched Squeals. 185
How Holiness Speaks Life

8. You Are Already a Runner 209
Claiming Your Identity as a Woman on Mission

9. One Foot in Front of the Other 233
Everything I've Learned about Running Well

10. Let's Go. 251
Stepping into the Choreography of the Abundant Life

A Dance, Stand, Run *Glossary* 263
Thank You 267

OUR *DANCE, STAND, RUN* DECLARATION

We are the daughters of God. We delight and dance in God's grace, and we don't want to take it for granted. We've been found out, found needing Him, and we won't go back into hiding again.

We are the daughters of God, and we stand firm on holy ground. We didn't get here by merit. We were bought and brought by the blood of Jesus. Here we stand, and here we'll stay. Our positioning and proximity to God means something, and both invite direction over our daily lives and decisions. We are here on purpose, a part of the world, set apart to be used by God to bring change. We don't conform to our environment or seek its approval. We grow spiritually while our bodies groan, and we live in this now-and-not-yet reality as saints in a fallen world.

We are the daughters of God; we are compelled by His grace and held by His holiness imputed to us through Jesus. We don't soak up the abundance of intimacy with God mindlessly, but we grab hold of all He has to offer us so we can give it away to everyone else. We run on mission, because when you hold the keys to light and life, you don't hide them.

We are the daughters of God, and we are ready to dance, stand, and run in faith for His glory and our good.

A NOTE FROM JESS

This isn't the kind of book you write alone or read alone. The theological weight of this writing was important to me, and I didn't want to get that wrong, but there was something else that pushed me to pull in my friends on this project. I wanted to make sure that the people I do life with, the people who know me well, could vouch for my words and stand beside me as I recorded them. When you're writing bold things about holiness, grace, and mission, you want to be sure that people who are part of your actual life will co-sign on what you have to say.

I wanted my friends to ensure that these words were gracious and genuine. I wanted them to check that the stories weren't self-indulgent or misleading. And most of all, I needed their covering of prayer—over my heart and yours.

This book wasn't written alone. In fact, at the beginning of each chapter, you'll see the name of a woman from my life. I asked these women to give honest feedback, to shift the content or to shift me on my position regarding the content. I'm so grateful for them, and I know you would be too if you saw the passion and prayer they put into this job.

This book wasn't meant to be read alone, so I strongly encourage you to read it with a friend (or a bunch of friends) and

answer the questions at the end of each chapter together. Don't hold back when you answer—dance in grace, stand in holiness, and run forward together by being genuine in your community as you sort through these words. This book is for you, and the fruit ahead, I pray, is all for Him. I love you women so much. Let's go.



PROLOGUE: PRETTY LITTLE LIARS

THE BOOK I DIDN'T SET OUT TO WRITE

*Read by Kelly Cowan**

We sat beside each other in the back of the church, with our knees touching and our deflated hearts mirroring the same overwhelming discouragement. Everyone else sat in front of us, their backs to us as they sang the last few worship songs, oblivious to the spiral of defeat we were swirling in a few feet behind them. My husband and I couldn't be much further from the typical pastor and pastor's wife, or so we're told. He loves to cook and is much better at laundry than I am. We argue over who is the bigger introvert. I don't play the piano or help with children's ministry, no one has ever in my whole life described me as sweet or quiet, and in the past year I've had pink hair a handful of times. Whether or not we fit the stereotypical description of a family in

* See A Note from Jess for more on this.

church ministry, at that moment I imagine we felt what thousands of ministers of the gospel had felt before us, and I imagine we'll feel it again in the future.

It was Easter 2016, our third Easter together as a church, and we'd anticipated it. Holy anticipation, sacred expectation—we were both hoping for some revival. We'd made invitation cards for everyone in our church weeks before and asked them to pray over who they wanted to invite. We'd held prayer gatherings to ask for God's power to be displayed among our people that day. Nick, my husband, had prepped an amazing sermon and then preached his heart out.

But friends? It just didn't go down like we had pictured. Nick had seen a few people fall asleep during the sermon, and from where we sat in the back, we could see people looking bored, using their phones during worship. I am sure God moved in people's hearts and shifted things in the spiritual space, but outwardly it looked like any other Sunday, or even a little worse. It felt like the dreaded "off Sunday," which flew in the face of the Sunday we'd anticipated, planned, prayed over, and hoped for.

So we sat in the back like two young kids who'd lost their little league game. We tried to encourage each other a little bit, rallied enough to say good-bye to everyone, tore down our mobile church (we meet in an elementary school), and took our kids to lunch to celebrate Easter. We didn't talk much for the rest of the day about what had happened that morning but instead shifted gears and discussed what the upcoming spring break would look like for our family.

The tension was thick. We'd hoped God was going to show up and do something incredible. We'd hoped for life change at least and revival at best. We were doing all of this for God, so wasn't He going to show us His presence and His power?

The next morning, in a quiet moment, I let myself pull the string a little bit. As I spent time with the Lord, I got honest and open with my Father and told Him how I felt about our Easter. I cried about my unmet expectations and what seemed like the lackluster spiritual state of our church. I told Him how hard it was to be a church planter's wife, and it was feeling particularly difficult with so little visible fruit and outward change. And then finally, when I was done telling Him how I felt about it, I decided to be quiet for a moment and let Him tell me how *He* felt. I asked if there was any correction or reproof for me, any part of this problem in which I'd been complicit without realizing it.

It's worth noting that I sure didn't anticipate a rebuke. I thought He might give me some piece of Scripture or sense that we were doing all we could do and confirm that this was simply everyone else's fault. True story.

I didn't sit long before something interesting happened in my brain. As I replayed the day, three particular conversations stood out. If my memory of the day was like a fluid stream of water before, now there were three ugly boulders disrupting the stream—three big boulders that didn't belong there. And these recollections didn't have anything to do with other people's sins or issues—they were about me. I had had three separate conversations with three separate women in our church that Easter morning, all of them eerily similar and kind of embarrassing to remember. And if they were embarrassing in my own mind, you can only imagine how humbling it is for me to share them with you now. But that's where we gotta start, sisters. Someone has to go first.

I'd gone to each of these women individually and told them about something that was on my mind, something I felt compelled to share and excited to talk about. I'd initiated these

conversations—with my friends, these women of God, on this super-spiritual and holy day of Easter—with an agenda. I point this out in such an explicit way because you need to picture it fully: these conversations didn't happen accidentally, and no one was trying to fill the space or make light banter. I went there *with intention*.

What I had to share wasn't a new passage of Scripture that was impacting me or a truth God was revealing in my heart. It wasn't a burden I was praying through or an answer to prayer I was eager to communicate.

What did I go out of my way to talk about to those three daughters of God that fine Easter Sunday? The show *Pretty Little Liars*. (Don't shut the book. I promise this is going somewhere.)

Now let me back up, in case you're not familiar with *Pretty Little Liars*, or *PLL* for short. Wikipedia describes it as "an American teen drama, mystery-thriller television series based loosely on the popular book series of the same title." Wikipedia also tells us it was meant to be "*Desperate Housewives* for teens," a theory I can corroborate. One magazine called it a cross between *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and *Gossip Girl*. So, yeah—that's the gist.

I just felt this utter compulsion to talk to the women in my church about it on that fine Easter Sunday because I'd begun watching it and couldn't get enough. Did I talk about how expectant we were for worship that day? No. Did I share with them how Nick and I had been fasting and praying for our people to experience the Lord on Easter Sunday? No. Did I ask them how God was moving in their hearts and lives? Give them an opportunity to testify to His great love and mercy? No. I just told them about this semi-raunchy, teenage murder-mystery TV show I'd been watching. *And then I plopped myself down in the back of the church wondering why we weren't in the midst of revival.*

And so I sat there the following morning, feeling all the love and grace and mercy from my Father, who knows I make mistakes over and over again. I didn't feel condemnation or shame, but a warm conviction spread through me. My heart began to beat faster, and my head throbbed with one very loud question: *Have I forgotten about holiness?*

What shift in my spirit had caused me to talk about something so profane when, in reality, I was so spiritually expectant? How often was I doing this—living on the outside like someone who isn't thinking about God all the time, when on the inside my heart is solely for Him? Was this how I was leading others? Ignoring the sacred to fit in and seem normal?

Had I grabbed grace and abandoned the call to be set apart? Had I missed the abundance available to me by walking the mysterious duality of relationship with God—grace *and* truth? I talk a lot and think a lot about freedom, about what I've been freed from. But suddenly I was wondering: Why don't I think about where I've been freed *to*? If I was taken out of darkness, condemnation, and the shackles of sin, then where does my soul currently reside?

I wondered: *Am I on holy ground? If so, how is that compelling me to live, and why, for the love, am I talking about* Pretty Little Liars *on Easter Sunday? Have I forgotten about holiness?*

I sat in my bed, having the most honest moment with the Lord, holding my coffee cup and looking out the window with clarity, confirming this one thing in my soul: *Yes, I think I forgot about holiness.*

Then I got out of bed and marched into my husband's home office, where I began talking and confessing and conjecturing in circles and loops. I went through the whole story and laid

my questions bare for him, telling him I had this rooted sense in my soul that maybe I wasn't the only one, maybe a lot of us had forgotten about holiness. He nodded and affirmed my verbal ramblings with a slight smile as he continued to let me process.

Then I started asking friends in whispers at coffee shops, "Do you think we've forgotten about holiness? Do you think it's just me? Is this a thing?" Their blank stares were followed by slow nods, maybe an errant tear or two running down their cheeks. After I confessed, they confessed in return. Though none of us had talked about it, we'd all felt some version of an ache in the back of our hearts. We were all living with some awareness of the tension between what we believe about God and what our lives *say* we believe about God. None of us wanted to tumble into legalism or spiritual perfectionism, but we were all feeling something here, a conviction that maybe something was amiss.

I couldn't help but think back on times where a friend confessed some sin to me and I plastered "grace" all over her with my words, dismissing her conviction. Memories of times I asked for grace in the wake of hurting someone, skipping casually over the process of repentance and restoration, suddenly stood out to me vividly. There were so many times I'd invoked grace for myself and others, and in these instances it seemed we traded what could have been sharpening and growth for easy dismissal.

We give ourselves grace about nitpicking at our husbands, not spending time with the Lord, misusing our finances, telling little white lies, having bad attitudes, and losing it on those around us in the midst of stressful days. We give ourselves grace, but somewhere along the way we stopped letting that grace transform us as it is meant to. And I wondered: *Has this caused us to lose sight of our holy standing with God?*

As I shared these ideas with my people, we realized that we talk about grace, mission, mothering, and our dreams. We talk about fashion, culture, the books we're reading, leaders we love, and things we're praying about. But we don't talk about holiness—ours or God's.

Oftentimes on Friday mornings, the women in our community meet for sunrise prayer at the beach. Sometimes there are twenty of us, sometimes there are three of us, and oftentimes it's just me. The Friday after Easter I met a few gals for our usual prayer time, and with shaky hands I told them, "I feel a tug to pull this string and linger on this question, asking it first for myself, and then for our generation: Have we forgotten about holiness, and have we traded our pursuit of the things above for a grace that is not compelling us to much at all?" They were honest and told me the question stung, but that they were glad I had asked it. Laughing, they shook their heads, gently joking with me about how I ought to write a book on the topic, about what a hard book that would be to write and maybe not an easy one to read, but I should think on it.

Here's where I should tell you that this is not the book I set out to write. But it has become the book I most need, and friend, I hope the same will be true for you.

My next step was to write a frightened email to my editor and agent, asking if I could change what was intended to be a lighthearted book into a pretty deep one. Jenni is my agent, and Stephanie is my editor, and they're busy women, and I respect them more than I could ever say. I didn't expect to hear back from them for weeks, but their emails appeared in my inbox much sooner than I anticipated, and they were saying the same thing everyone else was: *It won't be easy, but you should do it. Let's change the book: let's write about holiness.*

Finally I made my older sister, who was in Africa at the time, drop what she was doing and read a few paragraphs I'd written. Did she think I was crazy? Did she think I was abandoning grace or falling off the liberty wagon? Did she, too, resonate with this—this righteous, rumbling fear that maybe we've forgotten about holiness? These are the kinds of things you need your big sister to sign off on, even when she's five thousand miles away. We talked on FaceTime as she walked around, pacing the dirt floor of the missions base. She blinked back some tears, blessed the idea, and sent me on my way to write.

One by one, the people I love looked at me with kind eyes and quiet affirmations. They felt it in their hearts too, and they saw it in their communities. They felt the pangs of conviction deep in their ribs during conversations with other believers, and they experienced the dull ache of confusion when a group of professed Jesus followers seem to slink away in apathy from spiritual things, moving instead toward the things of this world. My people confessed that they, too, had wondered if our doctrine of grace had somehow eclipsed our understanding of holiness, rather than the two working together to help us live in awe of the Lord. And each of them said, "Yes, if you can write this with humility and a large dose of hope, this is the book you should write."

THE WRONG GIRL

If I'm honest, friends, this is the part where I want to slam my laptop closed and pick a new book topic. Because this is perilous and dangerous ground we're about to wade through. The first few days I felt the tug to write *this* book (instead of the one I had planned

to write), I told my Father in prayer, "*You've got the wrong girl!* I'm the wild and free girl. I'm the gospel girl! I love grace, and I am messy, and I have never stayed inside the lines. Ever. I cannot be the one to talk about holiness." I told Him I'd rather be responsible for writing about things that make people feel good, excited, and ready to tackle the world.

But in His gentleness, the Lord bolstered my heart. I felt free to stand in the truth that it's the wild and free women, the ones who love the gospel and soak up grace, who *need* to talk about holiness. I started to believe that strong words can carry the most hope, and when we allow ourselves to feel conviction, we are comforted by the Holy Spirit.

I'm not sure if you're like me, if you've avoided talking about holiness because you've discounted yourself. Maybe there have been conversations you've wanted to steer toward a more righteous tone, but you've thought surely you'd be misunderstood or discouraged from taking it too far. I wonder if there are moments you've wanted to push, prod, or ask a hard question, but you've been certain the people you're talking to will only see your past sin and your faults. In those moments, isn't it easier to stick to the safe waters of grace, rather than stir things up with talk of holiness or higher callings? When our reputation is at stake, isn't it often easier to take the more cautious path that doesn't expose us to the accountability our own hearts are craving?

Maybe you've had these hunger pains for holiness but you haven't wanted to make anyone else feel uncomfortable. You could be surrounded by believers who are seemingly older and wiser, and you're waiting for them to start the conversation. I'm willing to bet that a large number of you have tried and have been shut down. I'll never forget the story of my good friend, who felt a stirring in her

spirit to read more of God's Word with the women in her church. She shared this desire with her pastor, asking if she could start a Bible study, and was told that it might shame other women who don't like to read the Bible but instead prefer Christian books. Some of us only have to push through the perception and fear that our holy desires are too much; others of us have had those fears confirmed.

Or maybe, on the other side of the fence, you've fallen so in love with the grace message that's been leading the charge in recent church history that you've felt nothing but *relief*. It's certain that the American church is experiencing a surge of freedom, and it's a beautiful thing. I've heard it called various things: the Grace Movement, the New Grace Reformation, the Hyper-Grace Movement. Whatever it's called, the message is clear: For the past few decades, the American church has been receiving and believing the idea that we've been set free from our sin and made clean in a whole new light, with a whole new fervor.

We're listening to contemporary worship music, maybe even singing secular songs depending on where you attend church. People can now wear jeans to church in almost every city across the country, whereas that was an anomaly thirty years ago. We've got bumper stickers declaring that it's about relationship, not religion—it's grace, not rules—New Testament, not Old Testament!

I've sat with women in churches across America and heard them say things like, "It wasn't until five years ago that I started to *get grace*," or "You know, at the church I grew up in, we didn't talk much about grace. We talked a lot about what we needed to do, but a lot of what I'm hearing now is new and fresh." In some regions, they've been talking about grace longer or in different lights, but most people watching the church culture spectrum will agree—we weren't embracing grace, the way we are now, fifty or sixty years ago.

It wasn't that I was *trying* to forget about holiness, it's just that I heard about grace so much more. And I needed it! I *needed* to hear the good news of grace. I needed the balm that settled me and spoke at-ease-ness over my soul. I needed the good news that Jesus is enough and His forgiveness is all-encompassing to assuage the intrinsic feeling that I'm not enough. So maybe you're like me, and it wasn't that you wanted to walk away from holiness, but that you let it slip past you in celebration of grace.

I also recognize there are a slew of women out there who are nothing like me, and maybe by this point in the chapter you're feeling frustrated and riled up, thinking, *I didn't forget about holiness! Don't speak for me!* Maybe you've thought a ton about righteousness, about being set apart, God's holiness, our standing with Him, and the truth that how we live and act and move is a reflection of what we believe about who He is. But I wonder if you're like those of my friends on the end of the spectrum who've said they remembered holiness all along but have felt the ache in their bones from a lack of ability to trust in true, abundant grace.

There are telltale signs and symptoms when we swing too far one way or the other. I find that when we swing toward holiness and away from grace, we spend much of our days measuring—measuring how far and how good we are against the world around us, measuring the sin and fallen-ness of everyone else and fearing it might seep into our tidy, protected worlds. In the seasons where I've chosen holiness over grace, I've found that choosing to pursue holiness alone is never enough. When I start to think about living upright and pleasing the Lord, and I forget about grace, I am never enough. I am never up to par. I can never quite live up to the picture of holiness in my head.

And when we swing toward grace and away from holiness,

things get murky and dangerous in a whole new way. When we talk about grace without holiness, grace begins to lose its weight. If God isn't holy and hasn't made us holy, then sin isn't such a big deal, grace isn't so necessary, and it's a lot easier to dole out grace to one another. The only problem is, this easy come and easy go grace is empty—we can never seem to get enough of it, because it doesn't change us or spur us on to a better way. And when we've forgotten God's holiness and our own holy standing, which He so freely gives, we don't remember how much we need grace, so we certainly don't remember to give it to others. Grace without holiness fails us, leaves us wanting more, leaves us asking, *Is this all there is?*

The symptoms of forsaking holiness in my own life look like rhythms of constantly treating myself, excusing myself, and becoming desensitized to the things of this world that break God's heart. I forget that I was sent here to be the light in the dark, not to learn to love the dark myself. When I swing too far into grace without embracing holiness, I give up easily and early, without pressing in and pushing forward into the abundant fruit God has for me. I find myself defending my own sin and judging everyone else's, and screaming at the world, "I need a break! Give me some grace! Don't you see I'm trying over here?!" Grace without holiness doesn't satiate. It doesn't solve my problems.

Here's the thing. As I began to wrestle with God in this tension, He brought a wild possibility to mind: What if grace and holiness were never meant to work at odds with each other? What if God has always intended for grace and holiness to work *together* in gorgeous harmony?

What if God has always intended for you to dance in grace, stand on holy ground, and run on mission?

Can you imagine? If we put aside our struggles and stepped into a new way as a woman called to dance, stand, and run? Sure, it's messier and far more mysterious than an either/or, grace-or-holiness lifestyle. But I think that's what the abundant life looks like.

The absolute truth is that I'm not the wrong girl to write this book, and you're not the wrong girl to read it. No matter where your heart is in regard to grace and holiness, this book is for you. We *are* recipients of God's great grace, *and* we are set apart as holy daughters of God. I believe God has invited all of us to *move* in worshipful response to His glory.

It's time for the daughters of God to dance in celebration of grace, to truly grasp the freedom we have and the darkness we've been brought out of. For the sake of our own spiritual abundance and the glory of God, we get to stand firm on the holy ground that's been purchased for us by the blood of Jesus. We get to accept that when God calls us holy, that's exactly what we are, that our holiness was imparted to us through the righteousness of Christ. We get to live in a way that agrees with and affirms who He says we are. And in the name of Jesus and for the advancement of His kingdom, once we've gripped the grace He's given us by faith and planted our feet on His holy ground, we get to run on mission as ambassadors of life, hope, truth, and love.

We are the daughters of God. We get to dance in grace, stand in holiness, and run on mission. And we're ready to get started. Amen?

Chapter 1

WE'RE MISSING OUT

RECLAIMING OUR HOLY IDENTITY

Read by my sister, Caroline Hopper

I like to know where I'm going before I get there, which I feel is pretty common for most of us. No one wants to be sent to the dentist if she thought she was headed out for ice cream. And you certainly don't want to be told you're on your way to a wedding, only to arrive at a funeral. For this reason, I'm going to tell you now where we're headed so that we're all on the same page. This is a book of story and study that I'm praying leaves us all changed and shifted, with our eyes on God and our souls ready for action.

I'm a storyteller by nature, and I see so much power in sharing our testimonies and tales, connecting us to one another and the Lord all at once. So in this book, you're going to find real, true, honest stories—not tidied up or glossed over. (If we're going to talk about holiness, we have to talk about sin. And if we're going to talk about sin, we have to be real.)

But I'm also a Bible girl, a believer that our generation of

women can and should dig deep into God's Word—for our joy and growth and for His glory and good pleasure. So on the back end of each chapter, we'll dive into God's story and shift our eyes to Him for some age-old wisdom.

By now you've read my Easter Sunday story, so you know I'm coming into this book humble. I'm expectant. I'm not afraid of the outcome. I'm anticipating what God will do in us as we explore these topics, but I am humbled. Please don't picture me fearlessly leading the pack into battle. I'm sitting here, fingers literally trembling, coffee-fueled, and having asked many friends to pray for me through this process. I'm not writing to wow you, astound you, or compel you with my winning words. I'm not writing because I have a story to tell or because I'm just so incredibly gifted or because the words are all in me like soldiers ready to march out. I'm writing these stories and digging into this study *with* all of you because I believe God wants to change *us*—me, you, all of us together—and use our lives to change the world. I'm less of an expert and more a friend on the same journey you are. I've gone from having my heart pricked by some hard questions to searching God's Word for answers and seeking to understand His aim for our lives.

What I've found is that we're all experts on grace and holiness if we're believers in Jesus. We're all covered in the same grace and given the same image-bearing identity. Who would you count as the expert of going to the moon? The guy who has read the most books about it or the guy who has actually gone there? Who's the expert on knitting? The lady who has watched a million YouTube videos or the one who has made a sweater?

The same is true for us. There's a temptation to believe that we're not qualified to consider these loftier spiritual concepts if

we haven't studied up enough, if we haven't been to seminary or read our Bibles daily for twenty years. But that's where the ideas of grace and holiness diverge from your normal subjects of expertise, because it's not in reading or studying that we become authorities. It's in the receiving and believing that we find our identities as women who have grasped grace and been made holy. Since we're all in need of the same grace and imputed the same holy identity as image bearers of Christ, there is no margin for hierarchy or different levels of expertise. In case you didn't catch that word *imputed* in the glossary at the back of the book yet, all it means is that we've been assigned the identity of Christ. His righteousness, His holiness, His goodness. When God looks at us, He sees Jesus.

Because I believe it's easier to follow when you know where you're going, and because I believe lots of us have different connotations rolling around in our hearts and heads regarding holiness, I want to make my case for holiness as quickly and as plainly as I can. If you've been a follower of God for decades on end, or if you're new to these ideas and concepts, I want to invite us all to read the next few sentences with awe and belief. I want to invite the Lord to help us see the whole of holiness and respond to it in worship.

Followers of Jesus believe that God is holy, meaning He is set apart and completely and utterly unlike us. He is totally good, totally righteous, totally loving and pure. He is perfect, without sin. We believe that we, in contrast, are born as humans not perfect and not pure, but rather born with hearts that stray and sin, that swing toward unrighteousness and selfish living. That's the bad news.

Here's the good news:

God didn't just create us to watch us fail without hope; He always had a plan to bring the hearts of His people back to Him. The plan was to send His Son, Jesus, who is fully God and fully man, to earth to die for our sins. This is what we call justice—because God can't be holy and turn a blind eye to the fact that we're not. There had to be some price paid for the trespass of our brokenness as a whole. God sent Jesus, who is also holy, to pay the price for our sin, so that there would be justice and we could have a bridge back to God—that's grace!

God comes toward us with a solution that we don't deserve and couldn't have come up with on our own. When God looks at us, He sees the righteousness of Christ, He sees Jesus's perfection. So we get to act like His kids—coming boldly to talk to Him, growing in grace and truth as we learn more about Him, and looking forward to living in paradise with Him for eternity.

That rescue plan sounds great, but it's not even the whole story. There's more good news! God didn't just make a way for us to be in relationship with Him, He also gave us new identities—so that even when we continue to be human, continue to struggle, continue to need Him—we'd still know where we stand with God. He gave us Jesus's identity—that of a holy child of God, set apart to be in community with Him and to bring other people with us. That's our holiness, our new identity.

And there's still more than just victorious rescue and abundant identity. He also gave us jobs. And gifts. And passions. He didn't just allow us into the kingdom—He gave us the ability to use the individualized personalities, talents, and stories we possess to partner with Him in telling as many people about this amazing news as we can. That's mission.

So, friend! If you stayed with me through all of that, here

is what this means for you and me: if by grace we have faith in Jesus, *we are already holy*. Look down at your feet, look around at your home, and take a long glance at your life as it is now: you're on holy ground.

If you have the identity of Jesus written over your life, you cannot become more holy, you cannot grow to be more holy, you cannot act more holy. You just are. Already.

So what's this book even about, if we're already holy? And what if you don't feel holy right now? What if your life doesn't look holy right now? What if you see other believers or churches living in a way that sure doesn't seem holy to you?

Here's the deal: God made us holy when He sent Jesus to die for us and give us a new identity. BUT! The Holy Spirit gets in on the action throughout the rest of our lives when He teaches us in the same gracious way to agree with our holiness. God has already decided we are holy like Him; He's already done the work to make it so. The only question here is: Will we agree with that proclamation over our lives, and will we say yes to the work the Holy Spirit wants to do in us to make us more like Jesus?

First Peter 1:14–16 says it this way: "As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

If all of the New Testament is telling us we need God and can't work our way to Him, surely He wouldn't tell us to become holy without His help. No, He does the heavy lifting (by sending Jesus and offering us grace) and we do the agreeing—with our lives, our days, our spare time, our decisions, our relationships—by the power of the Holy Spirit. The incredible act of being holy, for us, is one of acknowledgment and confirmation when we allow

the miraculous work of sanctification, of God making us more like His Son.

I love how Ephesians 2:7–10, *The Message* version, puts this:

> Now God has us where he wants us, with all the time in this world and the next to shower grace and kindness upon us in Christ Jesus. Saving is all his idea, and all his work. All we do is trust him enough to let him do it. It's God's gift from start to finish! We don't play the major role. If we did, we'd probably go around bragging that we'd done the whole thing! No, we neither make nor save ourselves. God does both the making and saving. He creates each of us by Christ Jesus to join him in the work he does, the good work he has gotten ready for us to do, work we had better be doing.

Did you hear that? Our salvation is God's gift from start to finish. We're all equal recipients. So this book is a conversation from one gal to another, exploring what it's like to be spared from darkness, brought into marvelous light, made new in Him, called to consecrated living, and set free to run on mission. It's a reminder for us to look down at our feet, see where we stand with God, and to allow the holy truths He's written over our lives to compel us forward. It's not a book to "should" us into something we're not, but rather a book to help us recall *who we already are*, who God has already named us, in Christ alone.

I pray that after we recall, we'll continue to grow in our agreement with the Holy Spirit as our lives become even more filled to the brim with the holy moves of women who know that God has firmly planted them on holy ground with a purpose.

I'd love to just pause here and pray with you all if that's okay. Will you pray too? Add on to my words or just pray them for yourself, whatever feels right:

Father, we only care about this because we care about You. Because as Your girls, Your daughters, we want to know how to walk right with You—how to soak up Your grace and Your love, how to stand in the holiness that accompanies relationship with You, and how to run on mission into the world with the good news of the gospel. But real talk, God, this subject is funky. Over the years, a lot of us have been told crazy stuff, and we've believed slightly misleading information. Some of us have been digging for truth, and some of us have been scared to look too closely at what Your Word says about this, scared it will shift us more than we're willing to be shifted. But we're ready now to open our eyes and open our hearts. You're worth it, and we need Your help.

We're not scared, but we're humbled. Humble us more. Remind us of who is King, and remind us that you are the prize.

Holy Spirit, be gentle and complete. Work in our hearts and change us. Send us out. Keep condemnation and confusion far from us. Help us to read with eyes to see conviction for only ourselves, and give us blinders to the issues of our sisters and friends. We don't want to be reading with anyone else in mind but You—Your character, Your love, and Your glory. We're here and we're ready to dance, stand, and run. We love You. Do Your thing.

In Jesus's good and holy name, amen.

MY STORY: THE HOLY HUNGER

My spiritual story follows an arc that I'm finding is not atypical for women in my generation. I met Jesus at fifteen and spent a few years hiding. I hid my secret sins and my habits and my real thoughts and fears, because I wanted to appear holy. I hid my smoking, drinking, and some of the normal teenage no-no's, but I also hid the brokenness in my heart that led me to those things.

In those days, you wouldn't have heard me talk about body insecurity or feeling like I never measured up. I certainly wouldn't have shared that I was positive I was the messiest and most busted girl anyone ever knew, emotionally and physically. I kept all of that hidden and locked away, which meant I didn't have to be ashamed of my issues. As long as the outside of my life looked tidy, no one seemed too concerned that my insides might have some serious structural damage.

A few years after coming to know Jesus, I decided to "get serious" about my faith. My days and nights became all about ministry, and my identity became wrapped up in the things I could *do* for God. Not only did I continue to keep the secret sins and shame buried deep inside me, but I also began to serve at every single opportunity and try to out-read Beth Moore when it came to the Bible. I didn't know how much of the Bible Beth read each day, so I just guesstimated and tried to beat her, because that's what it takes to be holy, right? I was doing whatever I perceived it took to become "holy." For me that looked like working for holiness by trying to seem holier than the holiest person I knew.

But everything changed when I encountered grace and the true meaning of the gospel. My soul took a deep breath for the first time when I was enveloped by the liberty of our loving Jesus.

I discovered I didn't have to earn any kind of standing or holiness for God. In fact, I couldn't. Here's how that happened:

I was twenty-five, had three children, and had been in ministry for years when my husband literally sat me down and gently explained the gospel to me. He explained that my sins had already been forgiven—not just my past sins, but my present and future ones as well. He told me that the bad news was that I was not enough on my own, but the *good news* was that Jesus was enough and He loved me, lived inside me, and wanted good for me.

He lovingly told me it was a good start that I believed the gospel, but I could also *receive it* for myself. I could stop hiding all my sins to try and fit in, and I could stop trying to *serve my way* to God. For the first time in my life, I *got* grace. And for the most part, I felt the freedom to quit pretending like I had it all together. I felt safe to live as a daughter of God, to bring my whole self and story to the table, to walk in the identity of an ambassador and not an orphan who was desperately trying to earn her keep, to allow my hidden, inner wounds to receive the healing and life-changing light of Christ.

The changes were nuanced but real. My life might not have looked much different on the outside, but on the inside it was like I could see color for the first time. The idea that I could let go of the death-grip I had on "How is God perceiving me?" and instead allow Him to love me—it made my soul soar. I had thought I had signed up for a lifelong pursuit of earning my Jesus badge, when suddenly I realized He'd already stamped approval all over me and covered me in a banner of endorsement, just as I am, through the power of the cross and the resurrection.

I began to loosen up on some of the practices that I had believed kept me walking toward holiness. I stopped teaching my

(toddler-aged) kids dozens and dozens of Scripture verses. I stopped waking up freakishly early to read the Bible. I stopped saying yes to every single opportunity to serve. I stopped obsessively listening to sermons by multiple pastors and reading *Systematic Theology* like it was a magazine. For the first time in a long time, I picked up easy beach novels and began watching the occasional reality-TV show. I wasn't scared anymore to sing along to Adele with my kids, instead of keeping it VeggieTales only. I still served occasionally. I didn't talk as much about the difference between justification and sanctification, because I got what I believed to be the gist of the story: God was good, and He loved us. Right? Right.

I lived like that for the better part of five or six years. This inward freedom was such a beautiful thing, and I'm not telling you that it was wrong. I was giving my soul the space to long for God on its own, not pressuring it into submission with the threat of being discarded or discounted.

The problem for me was an equation one. I'm not much of a math girl, but I am a linear-logistical thinker and this is how I'd describe what was going on in my soul. My old equation had been this: Holy work + Clean living + Hiding brokenness = One day be holy. My new equation, after understanding more about grace, was something like this: Occasional work + Pretty much clean living + Being more open = Comfortable Christianity. I was unclear about where holiness came in, God's holiness or mine. I certainly didn't feel holy, but I also didn't feel the need to work for that favor with God anymore.

I felt relief from the lack of striving, but there was something else there too. My contentment with comfortable Christianity let me off the hook with its grace, but I wasn't sure what it *led* to. What was the point of it? My equation left me empty, hungry, and still

a little unsure of what I was supposed to do with myself. As the years passed, I started to believe that God might have another equation I was missing out on, one that equaled abundance and life. But I just wasn't sure what it was.

Certain activities exacerbated the ache in my heart—some you might expect and some you might not. Reading the Bible, for instance, always stirred up interesting feelings. I wanted more but I was never sure why. If I was off the hook and didn't need to work my way to God, was it condemnation and striving in my heart that left me craving more wisdom? Surely not, but I wasn't sure what the alternative was. I'd leave coffee dates with friends, feeling empty and achy for talk about eternity. I didn't want to slip back into uber-spiritual-working-her-way-to-Jesus-Jess, but I wished we'd talked more about the kingdom. Or maybe we had talked about church and serving and ministry, but I'd wish we had just talked to God together.

I'd feel the ache when I self-soothed with Netflix, when group conversations turned toward gossip, or when I bypassed homeless people seemingly carelessly. Some of the activities that left me feeling the holy ache weren't necessarily wrong, but with my current equation, there wasn't a clear-cut answer about what to do with these activities. I noticed that many of my friends felt unsure how our casual Christian community equation applied to different areas of our lives. We were free from the burden to live perfectly, and even encouraged in our transparency, but there were no clear lines for us to follow anymore. What should we do about alcohol? How much should we study the Bible? Is it okay to cuss occasionally? How much should we be serving? What about nice houses and cars? Are those okay? Where do we land about debt when we're not living in shame anymore?

There was a definite ache, a hunger to understand where this was all heading, and a desire in my heart to experience an equation that took God's holiness into consideration and gave me a clear-cut path to where that holiness intersected with my life.

It was as if the Spirit inside me was getting mouthier, crying out: "*This* is what you're meant for. Sure you have the freedom and the grace to live inside blurred lines, but just because you were freed from working for your place in the kingdom, you're not removed from it. You were saved from sin and set apart for more." When I was trying to work my way to God, the path was clear. But now that grace had entered the picture, what path was I on? What was the end goal? How did I get there? I was aching to pursue holiness but didn't know where to find it within the confines of my grace-based faith.

I didn't yet understand that our faith is a wondrous one that holds these realities in tension: grace and truth, forgiveness and holiness. For so much of my life, I *thought* I had to pick a team. I didn't realize they could coexist beautifully, just as God always intended.

Flashing back to that Monday after my somber Easter morning, all of these notions and ideas were swirling in my heart and head as the Holy Spirit started sorting out some serious paths to understanding for me. I was beginning to see a new equation, one that started with God's holiness and ended with mine. It looked more like this: God's holiness + Jesus's sacrifice = a new identity based on grace *and* holiness.

I was starting to perceive that I could accomplish my continual acceptance of grace while still standing firm on holy ground. And when I embraced the pardon that Jesus was offering and acknowledged the sacred, sanctified life He was leading me to, abundant

life was mine for the taking. More than that, if I could champion both grace and holiness, others might be spurred on, encouraged, and they might want to join me in this marvelous light.

My mind was spinning with fresh explosions of understanding that morning, and I needed to chart my thoughts. Here's what I knew to be true:

Somewhere along the way, I traded my pursuit of God for a casual acceptance of God's grace. I failed to make the connection in my heart that grace spurs us on to holy living when I stopped trying to live holy in an effort to be accepted. It hurts my heart (and maybe my pride) to say I accepted it casually, but I know it's the most honest thing I can say. What I'm realizing now is that without a sobering and continual look at sin and holiness, we can't truly grasp how great grace is.

This cycle of perceiving God's holiness, needing His grace, and standing firm in the holiness He imparts to me is one I'll be participating in for the rest of my life. He won't stop being righteous and otherworldly; I won't stop being dependent on His forgiveness, and I'll always need to be looking down at where He has placed me to remember who I am and where I stand.

If God's Word is true, then my sin is vast and separates me from God's perfection, or His holiness. But because of grace, I'm not only forgiven—I'm made holy like Him.

Through Christ, God's holiness was imparted to me, and my actions and my life were no longer about earning that holiness, but about responding to it in gratitude and obedience. I wanted a life that agreed with and affirmed what God intended for me, but I no longer needed to strive in an attempt to become what He'd already made me.

Looking at all of these truths and dwelling on them compelled

me to tell others what I'd found. If there is the opportunity for us to miss these foundational truths, even inside the church, I wanted to help remind the women all around me of what God has spoken over our lives. Moreover, I saw signs of women believing some of the same misconceptions I had: that grace was easy and cheap, not all that much to behold. I saw them believing that all of life was a path to becoming more holy, rather than standing in the truth that they already *are* holy and all of their days are an opportunity to agree with what God has said about them. It seemed that because of this, many women around me perceived mission as something they had to do or something they were potentially exempt from, rather than a beautiful privilege to share the truth they'd so miraculously received.

What I want you to hear most is this: If we could see the fullness of our sin and the depth of His grace, we'd dance. If we knew our true identity as holy daughters of God, made right with Him and called to stay set apart for His glory and our abundance, we'd stand firm. And if we fully grasped both of these things, you wouldn't be able to stop the women of God from running on mission.

All this came from three, minute-long conversations about a silly teenage TV show. God sure works in miraculous ways, amen? Second Corinthians 5:14 was ringing in my head that morning. It tells us that "Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died." Sitting and sipping my coffee, I felt the sobering realization that in *my* personal experience, I'd let the love of Christ compel me to continually thank Him for grace, but that was about it. I didn't let it compel me to change. God's forgiveness wasn't meant to be a numbing agent that tranquilized me, absolving me from seeking after the

things that please God. It took me a minute to realize that I could put down the belief that I had to please God to be loved by Him and pick up the more nuanced truth that *because God first loved me*, I might *want to* live in a way that pleases Him. God's grace is too powerful to let the transformation stop short at thanksgiving, before going back to life as usual.

I wondered if it wasn't just me who was getting tripped up in this equation, this idea that I need not be working to become a better person but that I merely needed to agree, or become who God has already made me to be. As I was feeling the weight of hiding my holiness, it wasn't that I was feeling convicted for not being good enough but that I was feeling the anguish of not being *myself*.

So that's where I sat on the Monday after Easter 2016. I was feeling the burden of having forgotten holiness. I was realizing that my head knew the truth—that I stood on holy ground as a daughter of God—but my heart was having a hard time catching up. I wanted to understand how and why I had gotten to this spot, starting with when I began to believe in grace instead of receiving it and when I had given up the pursuit for consecrated Christlikeness.

THE MAIN POINT IS THIS: WE'RE MISSING OUT

The truth I was missing all those years is that my faith life is not a two-party system. We don't have to *choose* between pursuing holiness and celebrating the grace we've been given. Instead, we're invited into abundant life—grace and holiness in harmony

together. Can I repeat that again with some emphasis? We don't have to *choose* between standing on holy ground and dancing in grace; we *get* to do both all at once. No one is saying we *must* live a different way, and you won't hear the word *should* come out of my mouth in this context either. I'm not passionate about this message because I believe we're doing it all wrong. I'm passionate about this message because I think that without it, we're missing out on the abundant life we most crave.

As much as this is a "get to," there's still some tension for those of us who realize this isn't the truth we live in our day-to-day lives. I'd love for us to sit now, holding that tension, aware that something is amiss among the daughters of God, that something has gone awry. Perhaps you're like me, and you feel it strongest within yourself. Maybe it's an ache you've carried for your sisters in Christ—you've longed to see them understand grace *and* truth, holiness *and* liberty. Maybe you just feel the tenderness for all of us, the sisters and the wild women of God across the world—the ones with the heaving and heavy hearts who have longed to feel at ease in their identities and in their relationships with the Lord.

Wherever you sit, I invite you to hold that ache and look to the possibility of grace and holiness working together in our lives—because it is going to be essential to our hope moving forward.

My favorite pastor (my husband, Nick) illustrates abundance for me in a way that makes me yearn for more, more, more of Jesus. I feel like Alice in Wonderland peering over the edge of the rabbit hole, ready to cannonball in and get lost in the mystery of all that He is. Nick describes abundance as being convinced that we have all that we could ever need, want, or desire because we have Jesus. It's true that our God supplies what we need and meets the desires

of our hearts, but abundance is about so much more than that. Abundance is rooted in the undeniable and inexhaustible truth that God supplies all we need just by giving us His Son, Jesus. We'll dive down this rabbit hole in later chapters, but suffice it to say here that when we accept God's grace without acknowledging His incredible holiness, we don't see the full, abundant, miraculous nature of this relationship we've been pulled into.

Rather than being women who are slowly becoming likened to the status quo that surrounds us, grasping grace and standing our holy ground enables us to change the world—not be changed by it. It's not that God needs us to get this; it's that we *get to* try and grasp it so that we can taste and see Him and share Him more effectively—experiencing more of Him here on earth than we would otherwise.

The point is, we're missing out. If we're *only* talking about grace, not receiving it and embracing it, we're not experiencing abundance. And if our faith lives are built on an assumption that we've got to work to become more holy so that we can experience grace, we're just as lost. It's in the celebration of grace *coupled with* the awareness that we've already been given holy standing with God that we start to taste the fullness of our identities. This is where it gets good, friends.

For the rest of this book, you're going to see that I don't just want you to take my word for it. These principles, these ideas about grace, holiness, and mission didn't originate with me, and as women of God, we *get to* hold our ideas up to the Bible to make sure we're on the right page and chasing the right questions. Will you join me as we dig into some other people's stories and some wisdom straight from God?

Let's Study the Word:

DANIEL 1:8–21

But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, but the official told Daniel, "I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you."

Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, "Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see." So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days.

At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead.

To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds.

At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so

> they entered the king's service. In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.
>
> And Daniel remained there until the first year of King Cyrus.

Daniel was just a kid. Scholars estimate that he and his friends were in their early teenage years. Daniel was a healthy, strong kid who didn't do anything to land himself in hot water, except maybe be born a little wiser and taller than other kids. But he was born into a remarkable cultural battle—a time when God's people were in the midst of a fight between their worldly identities and their kingdom identities, much like the world many of us found ourselves born into—like we're seeing our kids born into as well.

Daniel was the author of the book (but not necessarily the hero). He was born an Israelite, one of God's chosen people, in a tumultuous season, one in which other kingdoms were fighting over who would be in charge of his people. They were surrounded on every side by enemies and dominant governments: the Babylonians, the Persians, the Assyrians, and the Egyptians. Despite (or maybe because of) their hostile surroundings, the Israelites had just undergone decades of revival under the reign of King Josiah.

Josiah was just a boy when he became king, but as a teenager he was a monumental player in a redemption story—God's people returning to His Word, His covenant, His call for godly living. This was a season of heroes of the faith emerging and saying bold things about God. We don't see just King Josiah calling the

people back to holiness, but some major prophets also emerged in this season, namely Jeremiah and Ezekiel, who should sound familiar to us, since they have books of the Bible named after them. These were the kinds of days many of us dream of, the kinds of leaders who were written about in the greatest story ever told because their words impacted generations and nations. These books don't only detail the ministry of two rad guys; they speak life and light and Jesus to us even now—thousands of years after they were written.

So while I think the present is a pretty sweet time to be alive—we've got Beth Moore, Jennie Allen, Louie Giglio, and Francis Chan—it wasn't an uninspiring spiritual climate for Daniel either.

But then something shifted, and the first chapter of Daniel tells us that God allowed the Israelites to be given over to Babylon. King Josiah was killed in battle by an Egyptian king, who then appointed one of Josiah's sons, Jehoiakim, to be king. Jehoiakim was not the hero his dad had been. In fact, we see other biblical texts basically decrying him to be a godless, maniacal leader who weakly partnered with other kingdoms and handed over the people and products of his nation. He lived in incestuous relationships with his female relatives and basically was just an all-around bad dude.

Jehoiakim was a bad guy, the worst of the worst. He let the Babylonians come take the treasures of the people of God, and in the thick of all this drama, they took captive some of the young, noble, strong Israelite boys. The boys, who had just lived through revival and spiritual vibrance, were forced to leave their homes and families and were taken to Babylon to be made less Israelite and more worldly. The king wanted them to learn the Babylonian way—the language, the literature, and the opulence—for at least three years, at which point they'd become the king's servants.

Daniel and his pals were up against an interesting dilemma: How did they live under the rule of the king of their country while still honoring the King of their hearts? We could dig into Daniel for chapters upon chapters, but there are just a few things I want us to grab from this short passage.

HOLINESS PRACTICES A SIMPLE *YES* AND A SIMPLE *NO*

What we see was that Daniel embodied the clichéd but helpful, "Be in the world but not of the world." He said yes to going where he was taken. He said yes to the government, yes to learning. He said yes to being among people who were nothing like him. He didn't reject the people who did things that didn't honor God—he simply rejected the godless practices that would defile *him*. Daniel said yes to being in the world.

If I'm being honest, this is where the wheels get shaky for the women of God. It seems simple on paper, but it's much tougher to live out. We seem to be okay with one or the other: being completely in the world and just like it *or* being completely outside of it and only interested in judging it. God's way for us seems a lot simpler: be in the world, not judging it, but don't become like it either. It's a simple idea, but I believe we should keep saying simple things until we actually do them. It's harder to say yes to being in the world while saying no to being defiled by it at the same time.

What does it look like to do this in your life? Maybe it means being in the playgroup of moms who don't know Jesus but not laughing at the unkind jokes or leading the pack demeaning other women and men. Maybe it means seeing our lost coworkers

like real humans, for whom we want good things, so we're not only treating them decently but we're also pointing them to the truth and the hope that we have. For some of us, it might mean evaluating our rhythms and our hours to see if we're spending time in the wider world. Or are we surrounded only by other believers in a safety bubble?

It might mean holding off on the ranting Facebook posts, even when we're right, simply because they'd alienate and hurt the people God sent us to love and share the light with. Saying yes to the world and no to compromising ourselves might mean saying yes to the extended family dinner and no to the temptation to enter into the family conflict that ultimately isn't going to glorify God. It might mean saying yes to being in the book club and no to silently nodding when less-than-true things are being shared at club meetings. It might mean watching our modern-day celebrities and praying for them instead of bashing them, judging them, and only using their lives as entertainment—delighting in their downfalls or puffing ourselves up with pride as if we're better than they are.

I believe it's time for the women of God to return to the simple yes and no—yes to being with the world, no to joining in its sin. Not everything is clear-cut and easy to discern all the time—some decisions are gray, and some relationships are murky. But our God is not a God of confusion, and He's given us the gift of the Holy Spirit to continually increase our capacity to discern what it looks like to live in the world without being exactly like it. As we look at Daniel's story and our own lives, however, it seems clear that there is an open invitation to dance, stand, and run by saying yes to being with people and saying no to compromising ourselves in the midst of it all.

HOLINESS LOOKS TO GOD'S FAVOR ABOVE ALL ELSE

Do you know what the name Daniel means? "God is my judge." Maybe you hear that and think it sounds pretty stern—like he's saying it with his chin tilted upwardly just so, eyes on heaven, proud and tough. But that's not the picture we see of Daniel at all. We don't see him shouting at people or carrying picket signs, even later on in the book when he has to continually give hard news and interpret tough dreams. One of the themes of Daniel's story is that he continually looks to God for how he is supposed to live, and people are impacted by *that*, not by his decrees and declarations of how everyone else is supposed to behave.

So can we own this for a moment? This, perhaps, is another area where we've gone astray as the body of Christ. We seem to swing wildly between two camps: declaring what is right and holy for the rest of the world *or* shrinking back and timidly acting as if there is no right or wrong for any of us. The story of Daniel shows us another way.

What would it look like for Christian women to say, "God is my judge. Only God. I will listen to Him and His Word and let His statutes and wisdom direct my steps, but I won't spend my life carrying the belief that it's my right or my place to worry about how God is judging others."

What I think it would look like is this: Favor. Being winsome. Living healthier. Abundant life. Lightness. Here's what we see for Daniel: When he did as God asked him to, it went better for him! His life proved that the rules and ideologies of God aren't about keeping us locked up or trapped under His thumb. The ways of God are for our *good*, for our benefit, for wisdom in and favor with the world.

If the women of God danced in grace, stood their holy ground, and ran on mission, allowing only God to be their judge, we'd find people lining up to ask about the secret behind our thriving. You remember in 1 Peter 3:15, where it tells us to always be prepared with an answer for the hope that we have? How in the actual world can we be praying for that when we are not acting as if we have hope? How can we answer if we're not acting as if we believe God is in control? First Peter 2:9 says that we're a royal priesthood and a holy nation, chosen so that we may declare the praises of Him who brought us out of darkness and into wonderful, marvelous light.

It seems to me that Daniel continually found favor with the people around him, people who wanted the light he had *because* he chose to walk in God's will. He took God at His Word and tried His way, and the result was that others wanted to know more about God.

Let's put to bed the lie that we need to live out our faith in a more palatable way for the good of the nonbelievers around us. Let's stop believing that if we make everyone else feel comfortable by dimming the light of our vibrant faith, they'll be stirred and called up to join us in belief. Let's stop judging and condemning those around us if they haven't decided they're under the authority of God, but let's not believe the author of lies when he tells us that we need to tone it down to minister well.

I have a friend whose husband was on the path to salvation, but not in a relationship with the Lord *yet*. We were praying for him to love Jesus and all the while inviting him into our community. One day, my friend and I were discussing her fear of letting him see her worship freely, lifting her hands and crying during corporate worship in church. She didn't want to freak him out,

right? He didn't even believe in God. As we talked about it that day, I encouraged her to run full out after God and keep begging God to grab her husband's heart. That way, when he did decide to place his trust in Jesus, he'd know from the get-go what a passionate follower of Christ looks like. He'd know what abundance awaited him in intimacy with God. Wouldn't you know, a few months later, she walked in on him doing the dishes—worship music blaring, hands in the air, singing his heart out to God?

God is in control, and He will bring the favor. It's not on our shoulders to please or delight the world around us so that we can win people to Jesus. And it's not our responsibility to correct and judge them, since that will surely drive them away from the light. God is our judge. His way is perfect. When we dance in grace and stand our holy ground, He brings the favor and the fruit.

WE CAN BELONG, OR WE CAN BE USED

You can sit with us.

You belong.

Your story matters.

There's a place at the table for you.

These are some of the encouraging messages smattered on shirts and coffee mugs and journals in all the Christian stores in all the states. I won't lie—I've got a few of the shirts, and I like them. These messages are beautiful and helpful, and I believe during this space in history, when so many young women are unsure of their place and their worth, the encouragement is welcome. We have the joy of welcoming all the people, telling them they have a place with us, hearing one another's stories, and allowing God

to use them for His glory. We get to be people with overflowing tables and open hands, not crossed arms and saved seats.

The great news of the gospel is that as women of God, we *never* have to walk into a room praying someone saved us a seat. Our souls crave belonging because God made us this way, and He's the One who gives us our belonging. We're not meant to find our place or our inclusion in the world. Our "spot" in eternity was paid for by the cross of Jesus Christ. There is more here available for us than belonging in this world and our current culture.

Our friend Daniel did not bend to fit in because he needed to belong. Instead, he chose to stand firm in order to be used. I don't like the feeling of being left out any more than the next girl. In fact, I *hate* feeling left out. I despise the sensation that everyone else has the upper hand or that they have things figured out and I don't. I don't love knowing I'm excluded, and I certainly don't want to be discounted from my community because of my faith in Jesus. Let's be real: this doesn't sound fun to anyone.

But more than I want to belong, I want to be used. And when I approach a people group—whether it's the women at my church, the other moms at my kids' school, or the gals I work out with at the gym—I don't want to feel like I need their approval when I already have all the approval I need from Jesus.

I don't want to ask other humans to fill up the gaps in my soul. Rather, I want to be taking the soul answer to them: Jesus. If we're going to change the world and stop being changed by it, we're going to have to acknowledge that we already belong, we already have a place, and we're already accepted. Not by humans or community or the kind gals we do life with, but by Jesus.

Remember in 1 Peter 1 when we were told to be holy as God is? Here's some wisdom on seeking to belong versus being

used by God from the same chapter: "Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear" (1 Peter 1:17).

I also love Hebrews 13:14, which says, "For here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city that is to come." Looking down at our feet and finding ourselves on holy ground changes what we see when we look at the world around us. We stop looking at this city, this community, this world as our home, and we start remembering that we don't just find our identity in God, but that we find our future in His kingdom. We already belong, and we are so ready to be used to bring other people with us.

Women of God, I have a question for you: Are we ready to change the story?

Are we ready to wholeheartedly embrace the grace of God and reject the desire to belong to this world since we belong to the kingdom? Are we ready to take back some ground we may have given up when we lost sight of our holy standing? Are we ready to allow God to use us to change the world? Are we ready to move into this kingdom on mission, with our hearts more intent on loving others and sharing His marvelous light? Are we ready to dance, stand, and run—for the glory of God and for the sake of the world?

I know we are. Let's go.

Let's Take It a Little Further

1. What immediately comes to mind when you read Daniel 1:8? Are there areas of your life where you've resolved not to be defiled or compromised? Are there areas where you've lost some ground?
2. Proverbs 3:1–4 says, "My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you peace and prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man." Have you believed that to have favor with others, you had to please them? Have you believed that if you stood your holy ground and let God be the judge, you might be rejected? How do Daniel 1 and Proverbs 3 turn that thinking on its head?
3. Do you resonate with longing to belong more than longing to be used? Talk with the Lord and ask Him for some immediate action steps that would show you stand on the belief that His approval is more valuable than anyone else's.
4. Take the pulse on the presence of grace and holiness in your life. Is there one you find your heart naturally gravitates toward?

A *DANCE, STAND, RUN* GLOSSARY

Here's the deal, friends. We're going to go to some heavy places in this book, so I want us all to be on some solid ground before we do. We're going to throw around words like *holy*, *grace*, *righteousness*, and *sin*, and if I may, I'd love to offer a working definition of those meatier words. A Gal's Guide to Big Words, if you will. These definitions are adapted mainly from the *Baker Compact Dictionary of Theological Terms*, but they're heavily supplemented by input from my girlfriends and my own weirdo vernacular. Enjoy.

Abundance: (Greek: perissos) Abundance essentially means *more*. Exceedingly more, going past the expected limit. In our children's ministry, we describe abundance as an overflowing cup. There's more than you expect and more than you can perceive (if you're the cup). I don't know about you, but children's ministry illustrations always help me a lot. Example in the Bible: John 10:10, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Consecrate: (Hebrew: qadash) To consecrate is to set apart. God sets apart holy things for His glory and their good. He set the Sabbath

apart from the rest of the week; He set His children apart from the rest of the world. He often set particular people apart from those they'd be leading so they'd be distinguished. We (believers) are consecrated in love, by grace, to be a people of His possession to call others into marvelous light. Example in the Bible: Exodus 19:10, "And the Lord said to Moses, 'Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow."

Gospel: (Greek: euaggelion) Gospel is literally just a Greek word that means good news. The good news of Christ for us is simply this: Jesus, the Son of God, came and lived a sinless human life, died to pay the price for the sins of humankind, was buried, and rose again. When we hear this and believe it, we can receive grace through faith and be made new by the Spirit of God, united with Christ, and adopted into God's family. Example in the Bible: Acts 20:24, "However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."

Grace: (Greek: charis) Grace is the part of God's character that describes the gifts He gives us that we don't deserve. When we get mercy, patience, love, favor, and faithfulness, this is grace, as we not only didn't earn it, but our bad behavior should prevent us from getting it. When you break down the Greek word, you get a picture of God leaning toward us, giving Himself away. So let's put it all together: Grace is God leaning toward us, giving us all the good stuff we don't deserve, because He loves us. Example in the Bible: Romans 3:23–24, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

Holiness (God's): (Hebrew: qadosh) Holiness is God's set-apartness, His exaltedness above all created things, including us. His holiness encompasses the truth that He is pure, not corrupted by sin, and able to call other things holy (see consecration, above). In short, God is absolutely and infinitely better than everything else—He's the definition of good, great, amazing, incredible, and right. He's holy. Example in the Bible: Psalm 111:9, "He provided redemption for his people; he ordained his covenant forever—holy and awesome is his name."

Holiness (humanity's): (Greek: hagiazó) This word refers to an object that is called holy because God says so. It means that something has been purified, set apart, and should be treated as sacred. This is a description of our holiness. While we don't earn this, God makes it so when He pays for our souls with the blood of Jesus (see imputation, below). Because God has called us holy and set apart, we cannot become more holy or less holy. We can act in a way that acknowledges our holy standing, but we can't do anything to lose it or improve it. This is so important. If we are in Christ, we are holy. Example in the Bible: Hebrews 10:10, "And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Imputation: (Greek: ellogeó) Imputation is a spiritual act of imparting. It's one of the ways God takes His love too far in the best ways. He doesn't just save us and let us enjoy His own righteousness, He takes His righteousness and makes it ours. He has to remain just while also being loving. To be just and holy, to fulfill His own law, the only way for us to be in relationship with His righteousness is to receive His righteousness. Imputation is also synonymous with

"crediting." God credits us His good stuff and calls it ours. Example in the Bible: Romans 5:13, "To be sure, sin was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not charged against anyone's account where there is no law."

Mission: Mission, as a word, isn't necessarily found in the Bible, but it's a concept we see in Matthew 28 at Jesus's Great Commission to His disciples. He charges them to make disciples of all nations. When we speak about personal missions or corporate missions, it's important to keep this objective in mind. Other versions of this word we might hear and use frequently: missional (to be of the mind-set that what you're doing is intended to make disciples) and mission-minded (this would describe people who are thinking about making disciples or keeping this at the forefront of what they're doing).

Righteousness (God's): (Hebrew: tsedeq) This is a characteristic of God that is pretty simple. It basically means that God is always right. He cannot not be right, or He would cease to be God. He must always be accurate and just. He must act according to standards that reflect His holy nature. Example in the Bible: Psalm 9:4, "For you have upheld my right and my cause, sitting enthroned as the righteous judge."

Sin: (Greek: hamartia) Sin literally means to miss the mark. We sin in our hearts and in our deeds (or lack thereof), in any way we live that doesn't line up with God's code of perfection. Therefore sin is what separates us from being in perfect communion with God since His holiness makes Him exalted above all things imperfect. Example in the Bible: Matthew 1:21, "She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

PRAISE FOR *DANCE, STAND, RUN*

Jess is a friend who challenges me to the core. Her candor and conviction in *Dance, Stand, Run* left a mark on my heart. Take your time, let the words settle deep. You'll be changed and grateful.

REBEKAH LYONS, author of *You Are Free* and *Freefall to Fly*

Dance, Stand, Run is like water to my thirsty, overwhelmed, fast-paced heart. In words as sweet and conversational as those coming from a dear friend across a coffee shop table, Jess reminds us that we are made for so much, but that so little is required to soak in God's grace. *Dance, Stand, Run* has truly inspired me to my core to reevaluate the why in my life and to embrace the woman God has called me to be in an even bigger way.

EMILY LEY, author of *Grace, Not Perfection* and *A Simplified Life*

Jess is a voice our generation needs in its ears. She loves God with everything in her and shows us all throughout this book what it means to desire holiness in our lives. She goes first, telling us her struggles and triumphs, and then invites us to journey this path as well. Get your pen ready, because you'll be underlining this whole book!

JAMIE IVEY, podcaster, *The Happy Hour with Jamie Ivey*

Dance, Stand, Run, is far more than a great read—it's a life-altering experience! These pages shook me to my core and made me cheer out loud as Jess uncovered life-giving truth after truth. Most of all, *Dance, Stand, Run* gave me a new and fiery passion to do just that: dance in His grace, stand on holy ground, and run with God on mission. When the truth of God's Word gets ahold of you, it changes the very molecules of your heart. Jess hands over the truth of transforming grace and holiness with humility and courage. Dear friends, I don't casually invite you to read this book; I urge you to! There is no greater joy than knowing the heartbeat of our Father—no greater freedom or fuel. *Dance, Stand, Run* leads us to His feet and illuminates the most beautiful life path one can enjoy: His. Dance to the bookstore, stand firm to reach for a dozen copies for you and friends, and run home to read this book, knowing you're about to be changed!

LARA CASEY, author of *Make It Happen* and *Cultivate*

Some are dreamers, some are doers, but Jess is a dreamer who does. This is a go-getter's guide to moving, dancing, and running while doing it all with grace—the soulful kind of grace that Jess herself has discovered because she has lived it.

JESSICA HONEGGER, founder and CEO of Noonday Collection

If there is anyone who so fervently strives for the balance between grace and holiness, it's Jess. In her presence, I have been offered both pause and power, both hush and hustle. In her signature disarming honesty, Jess manages to spur us on and settle us down, all in one dripping-with-love invitation.

ERIN LOECHNER, founder of DesignforMankind.com and author of *Chasing Slow*

Jess humbly shares her wisdom and relatable experiences, challenging us on the intersection of grace and holiness. By asking us tough questions, we are surprisingly jolted into action and given ammo to fervently run on mission.

JENA HOLLIDAY, inspirational artist, SpoonfulOfFaith.com

When you pick up this book expect to be challenged, moved, and always pointed back to the Lord. *Dance, Stand, Run* isn't about striving, but about being changed by God. Jess is masterful at discerning the challenges of our generation and speaking truth right to it.

HAYLEY MORGAN, coauthor of *Wild and Free* and social entrepreneur

At the center of the Father's heart for you and I is the grace He's lavished onto us, the holy invitation for us to become more like Jesus, and His purposeful mission for each one of us. After reading *Dance, Stand, Run*, you will see Jess's heart burns for us to wake up and walk in the abundance God has extended to you and me through grace, holiness, and mission.

NICK CONNOLLY, husband to Jess and pastor of GospelCommunity.com